

9 English worldwide

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9.1 Introduction

The final quinquennium of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented interest in the topic of global English, articulated at both popular and academic levels, and a discernible step forward in the generality with which the phenomenon was discussed. To the media of the time, the global spread of English was an established and straightforward fact. ‘English Rules’ (*The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 12 July 1997) was just one of many newspaper headlines presenting to the world an uncomplicated scenario that took for granted the universality of the language’s spread, the speed with which it had happened, and the likelihood of its continuation. A statement prominently displayed in the body of the associated article, memorable for its alliterative ingenuity but for little else, reinforced the initial impression: ‘The British Empire may be in full retreat with the handover of Hong Kong. But from Bengal to Belize and Las Vegas to Lahore, the language of the sceptred isle is rapidly becoming the first global lingua franca.’ Millennial retrospectives and prognostications continued in the same vein, with several major newspapers and magazines finding in the subject of the English language an apt symbol for the themes of globalisation, diversification, progress and identity addressed in their special editions (e.g. Ryan, 1999). Certainly, by the turn of the century, the topic must have made contact with millions of popular intuitions at a level which had simply not existed a decade before.

There was considerable movement, also, at an academic level, but here a more complex picture was beginning to emerge. The largely article-driven literature of previous decades had typically been exploratory and programmatic, restricted to individual situations, anecdotal in illustration, lacking a sociolinguistic frame of reference, and focussing on the written (and usually literary) language. By contrast, the 1990s saw the emergence of a more comprehensive perspective in which spoken varieties became prominent, there was a real increase in the amount of descriptive data, and attempts were made to arrive at explanations and to make predictions of an appropriately general and sociolinguistically informed character. In particular, several book-length treatments by individual authors appeared, each providing a personal synthesis of previous observations and speculations, and focussing on the phenomenon of global English as an end in itself. Three of these treatments illustrate the kinds of theoretical issue being addressed: Crystal

(1997/2003), Graddol (1998) and McArthur (1998). Significantly – and contrary to the general impression provided by the popular media – the perspectives adopted by these authors, and the conclusions they reached, were by no means identical.

My own book is predominantly a retrospective account, examining the range of historical factors which have led to the current position of English in the world. Although avoiding firm predictions about the future, I think it likely that English ‘has already grown to be independent of any form of social control’ (1997: 139/2003: 290). In my view the momentum of growth has become so great that there is nothing likely to stop its continued spread as a global lingua franca. Graddol looks towards the future, beginning with the present-day situation, and examining the contemporary trends likely to affect the language’s eventual role. For him, English is certainly stoppable. Emphasising the unpredictability inherent in language use, he suggests that ‘the current global wave of English may lose momentum’ (1998: 60) and sees the real possibility of new language hierarchies emerging in the next century, with English holding a less global position. McArthur, adopting a more synchronic perspective, moves away from a monolithic concept of English. He investigates the kinds of variation encountered in the language as a consequence of its global spread, and suggests that English is undergoing a process of radical change which will eventually lead to fragmentation into a ‘family of languages’.

The arrival of these books, published within twelve months of each other yet seeing the issue in very different ways, well illustrates the naivety of the populist account, with its simplistic and often suggestively triumphalist tone. Their role has been to underline some of the parameters of inquiry which must influence the next wave of empirical studies. From a stage when there were few general hypotheses to motivate research, we now have a multiplicity of them. Some are issues relating to language use: several political, economic, demographic and social factors have been identified as potential influences on world language presence, all of which have been recognised as operating at local regional levels, such as in relation to minority languages (Edwards, 1992) or endangered languages (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998); however, the role of such factors at a global level remains virtually unexplored. Others are issues affecting language structure: the way in which regional and social factors influence the growth of language varieties and foster linguistic change has formed much of the subject-matter of sociolinguistics and dialectology; but here too, there is as yet little understanding of what happens when these processes begin to operate at a macro level. To take just one example: the radical diversification envisioned by McArthur could have several outcomes, certainly including the development of an English family of languages, but also resulting in various forms of multiglossia (going well beyond current conceptions of diglossia), the emergence of more complex notions of ‘standard’, and different kinds of multidialectism. We have as yet no adequate typology of the remarkable range of language contact situations which have emerged as a consequence of globalisation, either physically (e.g. through population movement

and economic development) or virtually (e.g. through internet communication and satellite broadcasting).

The emergence of English with a genuine global presence therefore has a significance which goes well beyond this particular language. Because there are no precedents for languages achieving this level of use (if we exclude Latin, which was in a sense 'global' when the world was much smaller), we do not know what happens to them in such circumstances. The investigation of world English therefore provides a fresh testing-ground for sociolinguistic hypotheses which previously had only regional validity, and a domain where we may encounter new kinds of phenomena which might one day motivate a global reconceptualisation of that subject. What happens to a language when it is spoken by many times more people as a second or foreign language than as a mother tongue? What happens in the long-term when children, born to parents who communicate with each other through a lingua franca learned as a foreign language, go on to acquire that form of language as their first language? If English does one day go the same way as Latin and French, and have less of a global role, the next languages to rise (the potential of Spanish, Chinese, Arabic and Hindi/Urdu is highlighted by Graddol, 1998: 59) will doubtless be subject to the same governing factors. So far, although we have a general sense of what these factors are, we have very little understanding of how they interact, and of what happens to the structural character of a language when it achieves a global presence.

This chapter therefore has three main sections, which in turn look at the past, the present and the future of English as a world language. I begin with a brief look backwards, to identify the factors which have enabled the language to achieve its global spread. I then examine the chief linguistic features which characterise the 'New Englishes' which have arisen as a result of this spread. And I conclude with some speculation about future trends. A pervasive theme is the lack of empirical data about the nature and rate of current change, which makes the chapter somewhat anecdotal in its references to individual locations, and promotes a certain statistical indeterminacy when making statements about world English as a whole. The chief reason for the lack of knowledge is the recency of the phenomenon.

9.2 The recency of world English

People have been predicting the emergence of English as a global language for at least two centuries (see Bailey, 1991: ch. 4), but in a genuine sense of 'global' the phenomenon is relatively recent. A language achieves a truly global status when it develops a special role that is recognised in every country. The notion of 'special role' is critical. It is obviously present when large numbers of the people in a country speak English as a first language, as happens in the USA, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and a scattering of

other territories. It is also present when it is made the official language of a country, or is given joint-official or special-regional status (the terms vary in different dispensations), and comes to be used as the primary medium of communication in such domains as government, the law courts, broadcasting, the press and the educational system. English now has some kind of special administrative status in over seventy countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, India, Singapore and Vanuatu. Then, in a different way, English achieves a special role when it is made a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching policy; it has no official status, but it is nonetheless the foreign language which children are most likely to encounter when they arrive in school, and the one most available to adults in further education. Over 100 countries treat English as just a foreign language (chiefly in Europe, Asia, North Africa and Latin America), and in most of these it is now recognised as the chief foreign language being taught in schools, or the one which a country would most like to introduce (if only more trained staff and teaching resources were available).

The term 'global English' thus had a genuine application in the year 2000. However, it could not have had such an application a half-century before. Although the notion of a *lingua franca* is probably as old as language diversity itself, and although a pre-Babelian romanticism is regularly encountered in the history of ideas (Eco, 1995), the prospect that a *lingua franca* might be needed as a practical tool for the whole world is something which has emerged strongly only since the 1950s (notwithstanding the efforts of the various artificial language movements during the first half of the century). Not only was there then a postwar demand for a mechanism enabling nations to talk and listen to each other on a regular basis, the actual number of nations in the world participating in that mechanism was soon to increase significantly. The United Nations had only 51 member states when it began in 1945, but this had risen to 191 members by 2002. The consequence was an increasing reliance on the concept of a 'working language', as an alternative to expensive and often impracticable multiway translation facilities, with English more likely to be the mutually accessible language than any other. Although the point has not received the historical study it should, relevant anecdotes abound. Alex Allen, High Commissioner for Australia in the late 1990s, recalls being present at the meetings which led to the formation of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development: simultaneous translation took place routinely into various languages, but only until 10 o'clock, when the interpreters had to go off-duty – at which point discussion would often continue into the early hours, with everyone using English (Allen, 1999). Reports of this kind of thing happening at political gatherings are commonplace now, notwithstanding the pressure to safeguard and maintain other languages at an official level, and are reflected in the daily realities of interaction in the worlds of business and education.

Translating daily experience into reliable linguistic statistics is virtually impossible, given the absence of routine data-gathering procedures about language use in the population censuses of the world. And when it comes to global statistics, we are in the business of informed guesswork. Still, international organisations,

Table 9.1 *Some recent estimates of World English speakers as a first, second and foreign language (in millions)*

Source	First	Second	Foreign	Total
Quirk, 1962: 6	250	100		350
1970s [cf. McArthur, 1992: 355]	300	300	100	700
Kachru, 1985: 212	300	300–400		600–700
<i>Ethnologue</i> , 1988	403	397	800	
[<i>Time</i> , 1986 estimate]				
Quirk & Stein, 1990: 60	350			
Bright, 1992: II.74	403	397		800
<i>Columbia Encyclopedia</i> , 1993	450	400		850
Crystal, 1997/2003	337–77	235–350	100–1000	1200
[based on 1995 populations]				
Graddol, 1998: 8	372			
<i>Ethnologue</i> , 1992	450	350		
[<i>World Almanac</i> , 1991 estimate]				
Crystal [current]	400	400	600–700	1400–1500

linguistic surveys and individual authors, using various criteria, have come up with some figures, and as they are the only ones available, we must use them, cautiously, as guidelines for thinking (see Table 9.1). Each category has an in-built uncertainty, the nature of which needs to be appreciated before the totals can be used with any cogency.

The first-language totals cited in the 1990s were swinging between 350 and 450 million, a considerable range – probably because of differences of opinion as to what should be included under this heading. The chief factor must be the status of pidgins and creoles historically derived from English. If these are considered now to be ‘varieties of English’, then their speakers will be included, and we will move towards accepting the higher total; on the other hand, if they are thought to be separate languages, whether on grounds of mutual unintelligibility or sociopolitical identity or both, then their numbers will be excluded, and the lower total will be more acceptable. As they are not a coherent group, linguistically, many possible decisions could be made; but significant numbers of people are involved. There are over thirty such entities (Crystal, 1995/2003: 346), which in the 2004 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* language survey are said to be represented by some 73 million speakers.

The second- and foreign-language totals, often considered together (as in parts of Table 9.1), are even more difficult to be sure about, for the obvious reason that fluency is a continuum, and commentators differ in their view about how much competence in English a person needs before being allowed to join the

community of world English users. A criterion of native-speaker-like fluency would clearly produce a relatively small figure; including every beginner would produce a relatively large one. A widely circulated British Council estimate – more informed than most, as it was based on reports of numbers attending courses and taking examinations, as well as on market intelligence provided by its English 2000 project – has referred to a billion (i.e. thousand million) people engaged in learning English (British Council, 1997). That figure needs to be interpreted cautiously, because it includes all learners, from beginners to advanced. If we take, as a criterion, a medium level of conversational competence in handling domestic subject-matter, then one might expect between half and two-thirds of this total to be counted as ‘speakers of English as a foreign language’. However, there need to be only small variations in percentage estimations in the more populous countries (chiefly, India and China) to produce a large effect on the figures. In India, for example, estimates of the numbers of English speakers have varied between 3% (Kachru, 1986: 54), 19% (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1999: 772) and 33% (Kachru, 2001: 411, reporting a 1997 *India Today* survey) – which in real terms represent a range between 30 million and over 330 million (for comprehension, with a somewhat lower [sic] figure, 200 million, for speech production).

Faced with such notable variations, in which people with particular political agendas can argue for English being stronger or weaker, a cautious temperament will use averages of the most recent estimates – as shown in the final line of Table 9.1, which gives a grand total of around 1,500 million speakers from all sources. This figure permits a convenient summary, given that world population passed the 6 billion mark during late 1999. It suggests that approximately one in four of the world’s population are now capable of communicating to a useful level in English.

Two comments must immediately be made about this or any similar conclusion. First, if one quarter of the world’s population are able to use English, then three-quarters are not. Nor do we have to travel far into the hinterland of a country – away from the tourist spots, airports, hotels and restaurants – to encounter this reality. Populist claims about the universal spread of English thus need to be kept firmly in perspective. Second, there is evidently a major shift taking place in the centre of gravity of the language. From a time (in the 1960s) when the majority of speakers were thought to be first-language speakers, we now have a situation where there are as many people speaking it as a second language, and many more speaking it as a foreign language. If we combine these two latter groups, the ratio of native to non-native is around 1:3. Moreover, the population growth in areas where English is a second language is about 2.5 times that in areas where it is a first language (see Table 9.2), so that this differential is steadily increasing. Graddol (1999: 61) suggests that the proportion of the world’s population who have English as a first language will decline from over 8 per cent in 1950 to less than 5 per cent in 2050. The situation is without precedent for an international language.

Table 9.2 *Annual growth rate in population, 1998–2003: selected countries*

	%	Total pop. 2003
Australia	1.2	19,880,000
Canada	0.9	31,590,000
New Zealand	1.0	4,001,000
UK	0.3	59,164,000
USA	1.1	291,587,000
Average population increase	0.9	
Cameroon	2.1	15,746,000
India	1.6	1,065,462,000
Malaysia	2.9	25,225,000
Nigeria	2.9	125,275,000
Philippines	2.1	81,161,000
Average population increase	2.32	

Data from Encyclopaedia Britannica (2004).

9.3 The reasons for the emergence of world English

Uninformed popular opinion often sees the global spread of English in terms of intrinsic linguistic factors, believing that there are properties in the language which make it especially attractive or easy to learn. The imagined simplicity of English is frequently cited, with the relative lack of inflectional endings, the absence of grammatical gender and lexical tone, or the non-use of honorifics sometimes cited as evidence. Ignored by this account are such matters as the language's syntactic, lexical and stylistic complexity, or the proportion of irregularity in its spelling system. Linguists, respecting the axiom that languages are equivalent in their structural complexity, have no difficulty rejecting intrinsic arguments of this kind. It need only be pointed out that languages which are strongly marked by inflection and grammatical gender, such as Latin and French, have been international languages in their day, to demonstrate that global stature has nothing to do with linguistic character.

A language becomes a world language for extrinsic reasons only, and these all relate to the power of the people who speak it. 'Power', in this connection, has a variety of applications in political (military), technological, economic and cultural contexts. Political power is seen in the form of the colonialism that brought English around the world from the sixteenth century, so that by the nineteenth century, the language was one 'on which the sun does not set' (Quirk et al., 1985: 1). Technological power is present in the sense that the Industrial Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was very significantly an English-language event. The nineteenth century saw the growth in the economic power of the United

States, rapidly overtaking Britain as its population grew, and adding greatly to the number of world English speakers. And in the twentieth century, cultural power manifested itself in virtually every walk of life through spheres of American influence. The core of Crystal (1997/2003: chs. 3–4) is the identification of several domains within which English has become pre-eminent in this way: politics, economics, the press, advertising, broadcasting, motion pictures, popular music, international travel and safety, education, and communications. Given this spread of functionality, it is not surprising that so many countries have found it useful to adopt English as a medium of communication, either for internal or external purposes.

9.3.1 Politics

As just suggested, pre-twentieth-century commentators would have had no difficulty giving a single, political answer to the question, ‘Why world English?’ They would simply have pointed to the growth of the British Empire, a legacy which carried over into the twentieth century. The League of Nations was the first of many modern international alliances to allocate a special place to English in its proceedings: English was one of the two official languages (along with French), and all documents were printed in both. English now plays an official or working role in the proceedings of most major international political gatherings.

9.3.2 Economics

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Britain had become the world’s leading industrial and trading nation (Parker, 1986: 391). Its population of 5 million in 1700 more than doubled by 1800, and during that century no country could equal its economic growth, with a gross national product rising, on average, at 2 per cent per year. By 1800, the chief growth areas, in textiles and mining, were producing a range of manufactured goods for export which led to Britain being called the ‘workshop of the world’. Over half of the leading scientists and technologists during the Industrial Revolution worked in English, and people who travelled to Britain (and later America) to learn about the new technologies had to do so through the medium of English. The early nineteenth century saw the rapid growth of the international banking system, especially in Germany, Britain and the USA, with London and New York becoming the investment capitals of the world. The resulting ‘economic imperialism’ brought a fresh dimension to the balance of linguistic power.

9.3.3 The press

The English language has been an important medium of the press for nearly 400 years. The nineteenth century was the period of greatest progress, thanks to the introduction of new printing technology and new methods of mass

production and transportation. It also saw the development of a truly independent press, chiefly fostered in the USA, where there were some 400 daily newspapers by 1850, and nearly 2,000 by the turn of the century. Censorship and other restrictions continued in continental Europe during the early decades, however, which meant that the provision of popular news in languages other than English developed much more slowly. Today, about a third of the world's newspapers are published in countries where English has special status (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2004: 818ff.), and the majority of these will be in English. This high profile was reinforced by the way techniques of news gathering developed. The mid-nineteenth century saw the growth of the major news agencies, especially following the invention of the telegraph. Paul Julius Reuter started an office in Aachen, but soon moved to London, where in 1851 he launched the agency which now bears his name. By 1870 Reuters had acquired more territorial news monopolies than any of its continental competitors. With the emergence in 1856 of the New York Associated Press, the majority of the information being transmitted along the telegraph wires of the world was in English. Some degree of linguistic balance would later emerge, but not for a considerable time.

9.3.4 Advertising

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a combination of social and economic factors led to a dramatic increase in the use of advertisements in publications, especially in the more industrialised countries. Mass production had increased the flow of goods and was fostering competition; consumer purchasing power was growing; and new printing techniques were providing fresh display possibilities. In the USA, publishers realised that income from advertising would allow them to lower the selling price of their magazines, and thus hugely increase circulation. Two-thirds of a modern newspaper, especially in the USA, may be devoted to advertising. During the nineteenth century the advertising slogan became a feature of the medium, as did the famous 'trade name'. The media capitalised on the brevity with which a product could be conveyed to an audience: posters, billboards, electric displays, shop signs and other techniques became part of the everyday scene. As international markets grew, the 'outdoor media' began to travel the world, and their prominence in virtually every town and city became one of the most noticeable global manifestations of English language use. American English ruled: by 1972, only three of the world's top 30 advertising agencies were not US-owned. Today (as of 2004), the American bias has decreased, because of the increased role of British and Japanese agencies, but the English-language dominance is still there, in 17 out of 30 agencies (and, of course, several Japanese agencies now handle a great deal of English-language work).

9.3.5 Broadcasting

It took many decades of experimental research in physics before it was possible to send the first radio telecommunication signals through the air,

without wires. Marconi's system, built in 1895, carried telegraph code signals over a distance of one mile. Six years later, his signals had crossed the Atlantic Ocean; by 1918, they had reached Australia. English was the first language to be transmitted by radio. Within twenty-five years of Marconi's first transmission, public broadcasting became a reality. The first commercial radio station, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, broadcast its first programme in November 1920, and there were over 500 broadcasting stations licensed in the USA within two years. A similar dramatic expansion affected public television twenty years later. We can only speculate about how these media developments must have influenced the growth of world English. There are no statistics on the proportion of time devoted to English-language programmes the world over, or on how much time is spent listening to such programmes. But if we look at broadcasting aimed specifically at audiences in other countries (such as the BBC World Service, or the Voice of America), we note significant levels of provision – over a thousand hours a week by the former, twice as much by the latter, at the turn of the millennium. Most other countries showed sharp increases in external broadcasting during the postwar years, and several launched English-language radio programmes, such as the Soviet Union, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany.

9.3.6 Motion pictures

The new technologies which followed the discovery of electrical power fundamentally altered the nature of home and public entertainment, and provided fresh directions for the development of the English language. The technology of this industry has many roots in Europe and America during the nineteenth century, with England and France providing an initial impetus to the artistic and commercial development of the cinema from 1895. However, the years preceding and during the First World War stunted the growth of a European film industry, and dominance soon passed to America, which oversaw from 1915 the emergence of the feature film, the star system, the movie mogul and the grand studio, all based in Hollywood, California. As a result, when sound was added to the technology in the late 1920s, it was spoken English which suddenly came to dominate the movie world. And despite the growth of the film industry in other countries in later decades, English-language movies still dominate the medium, with Hollywood coming to rely increasingly on a small number of annual productions aimed at huge audiences. It is unusual to find a blockbuster movie produced in a language other than English, and about 80 per cent of all feature films given a theatrical release are in English (British Film Institute, 1996), though this figure needs to be set against the amount of dubbing into other languages, which is steadily increasing.

9.3.7 Popular music

The cinema was one of two new entertainment technologies which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century: the other was the recording industry.

Here too the English language was early in evidence. When in 1877 Thomas A. Edison devised the phonograph, the first machine that could both record and reproduce sound, the first words to be recorded were ‘What God hath wrought’, followed by the words of the nursery-rhyme ‘Mary had a little lamb’. Most of the subsequent technical developments took place in the USA. All the major recording companies in popular music had English-language origins, beginning with the US firm Columbia (from 1898). Radio sets around the world hourly testify to the dominance of English in the popular music scene today. By the turn of the century, Tin Pan Alley (the popular name for the Broadway-centred song-publishing industry) was a reality, and was soon known worldwide as the chief source of US popular music. Jazz, too, had its linguistic dimension, with the development of the blues and many other genres. And by the time modern popular music arrived, it was almost entirely an English scene. The pop groups of two chief English-speaking nations were soon to dominate the recording world: Bill Haley and the Comets and Elvis Presley in the USA; the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in the UK. Mass audiences for pop singers became a routine feature of the world scene from the 1960s. No other single source has spread the English language around the youth of the world so rapidly and so pervasively.

9.3.8 International travel and safety

For those whose international travel brings them into a world of package holidays, business meetings, academic conferences, international conventions, community rallies, sporting occasions, military occupations, and other ‘official’ gatherings, the domains of transportation and accommodation are chiefly mediated through the use of English as an auxiliary language. Safety instructions on international flights and sailings, information about emergency procedures in hotels, and directions to major locations are now increasingly in English alongside local languages. A special aspect of safety is the way that the language has come to be used as a means of controlling international transport operations, especially on water and in the air. English has emerged as the international language of the sea, in the form of Essential English for International Maritime Use – often referred to as ‘Seaspeak’ (Weeks, Glover, Strevens & Johnson, 1984). ‘Airspeak’, the language of international aircraft control, emerged after the Second World War, when the International Civil Aviation Organisation was created, and it was agreed that English should be the international language of aviation when pilots and controllers speak different languages (a principle which is not always respected in practice, as air disasters sometimes bring to light).

9.3.9 Education

English is the medium of a great deal of the world’s knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology; and access to knowledge is

the business of education. When we investigate why so many nations have in recent years made English an official language or chosen it as their chief foreign language in schools, one of the most important reasons is always educational. Since the 1960s, English has become the normal medium of instruction in higher education for many countries – including several where the language has no official status. Advanced courses in the Netherlands, for example, are widely taught in English. No African country uses its indigenous language in higher education, English being used in the majority of cases. The English language teaching (ELT) business has become one of the major growth industries around the world in the past half century. However, its relevance to the growth of English as a world language goes back much further. In the final quarter of the eighteenth century, we find several examples of English grammars, such as Lindley Murray's, being translated into other languages (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 1996b).

9.3.10 Communications

If a language is a truly international medium, it is going to be most apparent in those services which deal directly with the task of communication – the postal and telephone systems and the electronic networks. Information about the use of English in these domains is not easy to come by, however. It is thought that three-quarters of the world's mail is in English; but as no one monitors the language in which we write our letters, such statistics are highly speculative. Only on the internet, where messages and data can be left for indefinite periods of time, is it possible to develop an idea of how much of the world's everyday communications (at least, between computer-owners) is actually in English. The internet began as ARPANET, the Advanced Research Projects Agency network, in the late 1960s, in the USA. Its language was, accordingly, English; and when people in other countries began to form links with this network, it proved essential for them to use English. The dominance of this language was then reinforced when the service was opened up in the 1980s to private and commercial organisations, most of which were (for the reasons already given) already communicating chiefly in English. However, as the internet has spread, the dominance of English has significantly reduced. By 2000, the proportion of internet hosts in English had fallen to around 80 per cent (Crystal, 2001), and by 2003 this figure was less than 70 per cent. The proportion of internet users in English-speaking countries showed an even more dramatic fall in the new millennium, according to Global Reach Surveys (<http://www.glreach.com/globstats/>) – to 43 per cent by December 2001 and to 35.8 per cent by March 2004. Internet usage will in due course probably reflect the balance of linguistic power in the outside world. On the other hand, the headstart English has had means that there is more high-quality content on the web in English than in other languages, so that even if the number of English websites falls further, the number of hits on those sites (i.e. individuals calling up specific web addresses) may remain disproportionately high for some time.

9.4 The future of English as a world language

Language is an immensely democratising institution. To have learned a language is immediately to have rights in it. You may add to it, modify it, play with it, create in it, ignore bits of it, as you will. And it is just as likely that the course of the English language is going to be influenced by those who speak it as a second or foreign language as by those who speak it as a mother tongue. Fashions count, in language, as anywhere else. And fashions are a function of numbers. As we have seen, the total number of mother-tongue speakers in the world is steadily falling, as a proportion of world English users. It is perfectly possible for a linguistic fashion to be started by a group of second- or foreign-language learners, or (as the example of rapping suggests) by those who speak a creole or pidgin variety, which then catches on among other speakers. And as numbers grow, and second/foreign-language speakers gain in national and international prestige, usages which were previously criticised as ‘foreign’ – such as a new concord rule (*three person*), variations in countability (*furnitures, kitchenwares*) or verb use (*he be running*) – can become part of the standard educated speech of a locality, and may eventually appear in writing.

What power and prestige is associated with these new varieties of English? It is all happening so quickly that it is difficult to be sure; there have been so few studies. But impressionistically, we can see several of these new linguistic features achieving an increasingly public profile, in their respective countries. Words become used less self-consciously in the national press – no longer being put in inverted commas, for example, or given a gloss. They come to be adopted, often at first with some effort, then more naturally, by first-language speakers of English in the locality. Indeed, the canons of local political correctness, in the best sense of that phrase, may foster a local usage, giving it more prestige than it could ever have dreamed of – a good example is the contemporary popularity in New Zealand English of Maori words (and the occasional Maori grammatical feature, such as the dropping of the definite article before the people name *Maori* itself). And, above all, the local words begin to be used at the prestigious levels of society – by politicians, religious leaders, socialites, pop musicians and others. Using local words is then no longer to be seen as slovenly or ignorant, within a country; it is respectable; it may even be ‘cool’.

The next step is the move from national to international levels. These people who are important in their own communities – whether politicians or pop stars – start travelling abroad. The rest of the world looks up to them, either because it wants what they have, or because it wants to sell them something. And the result is the typical present-day scenario – an international gathering (political, educational, economic, artistic . . .) during which senior visitors use, deliberately or unselfconsciously, a word or phrase from their own country which would not be found in the traditional standards of British or American English. Once upon a time, the reaction would have been to condemn the usage as ignorance.

Today, it is becoming increasingly difficult to say this, or even to think it, if the visitors have more degrees than the visited, or own a bigger company, or are social equals in every way. In such circumstances, one has to learn to live with the new usage, as a feature of increasing diversity in English. It can take a generation or two, but it does happen. It happened within fifty years between Britain and America: by 1842, Charles Dickens (in his *American Notes*, revised in 1868) made some observations about American linguistic usage – such as (in chapter 9) his amazement at the many ways that Americans use the verb *fix* – all expressed in tones of delight, not dismay. But, whatever your attitude towards new usages – and there will always be people who sneer at diversity – there is no getting away from the fact that, these days, regional national varieties of English are increasingly being used with prestige on the international scene.

If these New Englishes are becoming standardised, as markers of educated regional identity, what is taking their place elsewhere within the social spectrum of these communities? Here, very little descriptive research has been done, but there are enough anecdotal reports to suggest the way things are going. When actual examples of language in use are analysed, in such multilingual settings as Malaysia and Singapore, we immediately encounter varieties which make use of the different levels of code-mixing illustrated above. Conversations of that kind, between well-educated people, are now heard at grass-roots level in communities all over the English-speaking world (Mesthrie, 1992; Siegel, 1995). However, establishment attitudes towards these varieties are still generally negative. In 1999, for example, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore devoted several minutes of his National Day Rally speech to a plea for Singaporeans to cut down on their use of Singlish (a hybrid of English, Chinese and Malay) and to maintain the use of standard English, if the country's aims for a greater international role were to be realised. He illustrated this part of the speech with some Singlish expressions, then focussed his anxiety on the influence of the media, and in particular the leading character from the country's highly popular television sitcom, Phua Chu Kang ('PCK'), known for his rapid, fluent Singlish. The prime minister then approached the Television Corporation of Singapore, and asked them to do something about it; they then agreed to enrol PCK in some basic English classes so that he could improve his standard English. The action was widely reported both within the country (e.g. *The Straits Times*, 23 August 1999) and abroad, and not without scepticism. As the *Independent* put it (17 October 1999), the chastising of Phua Chu Kang 'was something like the Queen rebuking Del Boy during the opening of parliament'.

That language should receive such a high profile in a 'state of the union' address is itself surprising, and that a head of government should go out of his way to influence a television sitcom is probably unprecedented in the history of language planning! But it well illustrates the direction in which matters are moving. Singlish must now be a significant presence in Singapore for it to attract this level of attention and condemnation. And the nature of the reaction also well illustrates the nature of the problem which all New Englishes encounter, in their early

stages. It is the same problem that older varieties of English also encountered: the view that there can only be one kind of English, the standard kind, and that all others should be eliminated. From the days when this mindset first became dominant, in the eighteenth century, Britain and a few other countries have taken some 250 years to confront it and replace it with a more egalitarian perspective, in educational curricula (Crystal, 2004). The contemporary view, as represented in the UK National Curriculum, is to maintain the importance of standard English while at the same time maintaining the value of local accents and dialects. The intellectual basis for this policy is the recognition of the fact that language has many functions, and that the reason for the existence of standard English (to promote mutual intelligibility) is different from the reason for the existence of local dialects (to promote local identity). The same arguments apply, with even greater force, on a global scale. There is no intrinsic conflict between standard English and Singlish in Singapore, as the reasons for the existence of the former, to permit Singaporeans of different linguistic backgrounds to communicate with each other and with people abroad, are different from the reasons for the emergence of the latter, to provide a sense of local identity. Ironically, the prime minister himself recognised the importance of both these goals, in emphasising that the future of Singapore needed both an outward-looking set of economic and cultural goals as well as an inward-looking sense of the 'something special and precious' in the Singaporean way of life. A bidialectal (or bilingual) policy allows a people to look both ways at once, and would be the most efficient way of the country achieving its aims. Fostering standard English is one plank of such a policy. Condemning Singlish is not.

Similar attitudes will be encountered in all parts of the world where English is developing a strong non-native presence, and at all levels. Teachers of English as a second or foreign language have to deal with the situation routinely, with students increasingly arriving in the classroom speaking a dialect which is markedly different from standard English. The question of just how much local phonology, grammar, vocabulary and pragmatics should be allowed in is difficult and contentious. But there seems no doubt that, gradually, there is a definite ameliorative trend around the English-speaking world, with expressions which were once heavily penalised as local and low-class now achieving a degree of status. How fast this trend develops depends on economic and social factors more than on anything else. If the people who use mixed varieties as markers of their identity become more influential, attitudes will change, and usages will become more acceptable. In fifty years time, we could find ourselves with an English language which contains within itself large areas of contact-influenced vocabulary, borrowed from such languages as Malay or Chinese, being actively used in Singapore, Malaysia and emigrant communities elsewhere. First-language speakers from those areas would instinctively select this vocabulary as their first choice in conversation. Everyone else would recognise their words as legitimate options – passively, at least, with occasional forays into active use. It is a familiar story, in the history of the English language, though operating now on a global scale.

Indeed, such a scenario would not be so different from that already found in English. There are over 350 living languages given as vocabulary sources in the files of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. And, for example, there are already over 250 words with Malay as part of their etymology in the *OED*. So the foundation is already laid. The contact-language words of the future will of course include more alternative rather than supplementary expressions – localised words for everyday notions, such as tables and chairs, rather than for regionally restricted notions, such as fauna and flora – but the notion of a lexical mosaic as such is not new. It has always been part of the language.

9.5 An English family of languages?

The future of world English is likely to be one of increasing multidialectism; but could this become multilingualism? Is English going to fragment into mutually unintelligible varieties, just as Vulgar Latin did a millennium ago? The forces of the past fifty years, which have led to so many New Englishes, suggest this outcome. If such significant change can be noticed within a relatively short period of time, must not these varieties become even more differentiated over the next century, so that we end up, as McArthur (1998) argues, with an English ‘family of languages’?

The question does not have a single answer. The history of language suggests that fragmentation has been a frequent phenomenon (as in the well-known case of Latin); but the history of language is no longer a guide. Today, we live in the proverbial global village, where we have immediate access to other languages and varieties of English in ways that have come to be available but recently; and this is having a strong centripetal effect. With a whole range of fresh auditory models becoming routinely available, chiefly through satellite television, it is easy to see how any New English could move in different directions at the same time. The pull imposed by the need for identity, which has been making New Englishes increasingly dissimilar from British English, could be balanced by a pull imposed by the need for intelligibility, on a world scale, which will make them increasingly similar. At the former level, there may well be increasing mutual unintelligibility; but at the latter level, there might not.

None of this disallows the possible emergence of a family of English languages in a sociolinguistic sense; but mutual unintelligibility will not be the basis of such a notion in the case of New Englishes, any more than it has been in relation to intra-national accents and dialects. Although there are several well-known instances of dialect unintelligibility among people from different regional backgrounds, especially when encountered at rapid conversational speed – in Britain, Cockney (London), Geordie (Newcastle), Scouse (Liverpool) and Glaswegian (Glasgow) are among the most commonly cited cases – the problems largely resolve when a speaker slows down, or they reduce to difficulties over isolated lexical items.

This makes regional varieties of English no more problematic for linguistic theory than, say, occupational varieties such as legal or scientific. It is no more illuminating to call Cockney or Scouse ‘different English languages’ than it would be to call Legal or Scientific by such a name, and anyone who chooses to extend the application of the term ‘language’ in this way finds a slippery slope which eventually leads to the blurring of the potentially useful distinctions between ‘language’, ‘variety’ and ‘dialect’.

The intelligibility criterion has traditionally provided little support for an English ‘language family’. But we have learned from sociolinguistics in recent decades that this criterion is by no means an adequate explanation for the language nomenclature of the world, as it leaves out of consideration linguistic attitudes, and in particular the criterion of identity. It is this which allows us to say that people from Norway, Sweden and Denmark speak different languages, notwithstanding the considerable amount of intelligibility which exists between them. It seems that if a community wishes its way of speaking to be considered a ‘language’, and if they have the political power to support their decision, there is nothing which can stop them doing so. The present-day ethos is to allow communities to deal with their own internal policies themselves, as long as these are not perceived as being a threat to others. However, to promote an autonomous language policy, two criteria need to be satisfied. The first is to have a community with a single mind about the matter, and the second is to have a community which has enough political-economic ‘clout’ to make its decision respected by outsiders with whom it is in regular contact. When these criteria are lacking, any such movement is doomed.

There are very few examples of English generating varieties which are given totally different names, and even fewer where these names are rated as ‘languages’ (as opposed to ‘dialects’). There are some cases among the English-derived pidgins and creoles around the world (e.g. *Tok Pisin*, *Gullah*), but any proposal for language status is invariably surrounded with controversy. An instance from the mid-1990s is the case of *Ebonics* – a blend of *Ebony* + *phonics* – proposed for the variety of English spoken by African Americans, and which had previously been called by such names as *Black Vernacular English* or *African-American Vernacular English* (McArthur, 1998: 197ff.). Although the intentions behind the proposal were noble, and attracted some support, it was denounced by people from across the political and ethnic spectrum, including such prominent individuals as the education secretary Richard W. Riley, black civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson and writer Maya Angelou. Quite evidently the two criteria above did not obtain: the US black community did not have a single mind about the matter, and the people who had the political-economic clout to make the decision respected also had mixed views about it.

By giving a distinct name, *Ebonics*, to what had previously been recognised as a variety of English, a hidden boundary in the collective unconscious seems to have been crossed. It is in fact very unusual to assign a novel name to a variety of English in this way, other than in the humorous literature, where such

names as *Strine* (a spelling of an imagined casual Australian pronunciation of the word 'Australian') can be found. There are indeed many world English locations which have generated their regional humour book, in which the local accent or dialect is illustrated by comic 'translations' into standard English (see Crystal, 1998). Exchanges of this kind, however, are part of the genre of language play, and recognised as such by author and reader. They are not serious attempts to upgrade the status of the dialect into a separate language. The notion of translation which they employ is purely figurative. Indeed, the humour depends on a tacit recognition of the fact that we are dealing with a variety which is 'non-standard', and that people can recognise what it is saying. There is no true intelligibility problem and no problem of identity status.

There is one clear case where a specific regional variety of English has acquired a new name as part of its claim to be recognised as a standard in its locality: Scots. Here is McArthur's summary of the situation (1998: 138):

The people of Scotland occupy a unique historical and cultural position in the English-speaking world. They use the standard language (with distinctive phonological, grammatical, lexical, and idiomatic features) in administration, law, education, the media, all national institutions, and by and large in their dealings with Anglophones elsewhere, but in their everyday lives a majority of them mix 'the King's English' with what in an earlier age was called 'the King's Scots'.

How does Scots stand in relation to the two criteria referred to above? The situation is complex, because the Scots community does not have a single mind about the matter, nor has it had enough political-economic power to make any decision respected by outsiders. In relation to the former point, the case in favour has been strongly argued by the leading scholar on Scots, Jack Aitken. After reviewing the arguments, he concludes (1985: 44):

All the phenomena just recounted – the distinctiveness of Scots, its still substantial presence in daily speech, the fact that it was once the national language, its identifiably distinct history, its adoption (some Gaels would call it usurpation) of the nation's name, and the massive and remarkable and still vital literature in it, mutually support one another and one further and remarkable phenomenon – the ancient and still persistent notion that Scots is indeed 'the Scottish language'.

But the missionary tone of this quotation, along with the indication that at least one section of the Scottish community thinks differently, suggests a complex sociolinguistic situation; and at the end of his article even Aitken pulls back from the brink:

I believe what I have written suggests that if Scots is not now a full 'language' it is something more than a mere 'dialect'. A distinguished German scholar once called it a *Halbsprache* – a semi-language.

In relation to the second criterion, it remains to be seen whether the changing political situation in Scotland (the 1997 referendum on devolution agreeing the formation of a new Scots Assembly) will produce a stronger voice in favour of Scots. McArthur is doubtful (1998: 138):

Any political change in the condition of Scotland is unlikely to have a direct influence on the shaky condition of Scots or Gaelic, because the movement for Scottish autonomy (within the EU) does not have a linguistic dimension to it.

If he is right, then that eliminates the strongest traditional contender for a separate identity within an English family of languages.

In all these cases of emerging linguistic status, however, the number of speakers involved has been a minority, within a much larger sociopolitical entity. We have yet to see whether the same situation will obtain in countries where the New English speakers are in a majority and hold political power, or in locations where new, supranational political relationships are being formed. For example, although several languages are co-official in the European Union, pragmatic linguistic realities result in English being the most widely used language in these corridors (see above). But what kind of common English emerges, when Germans, French, Greeks and others come into contact, each using English with its own pattern of interference from the mother tongue? There will be the usual sociolinguistic accommodation (Giles & Smith, 1979), and the result will be a novel variety, of 'Euro-English' – a term which has been used for over a decade with reference to the distinctive vocabulary of the Union (with its *Eurofighters*, *Eurodollars*, *Euroseptics* and so on), but which must now be extended to include the various hybrid accents, grammatical constructions and discourse patterns encountered there. On several occasions, I have encountered English-as-a-first-language politicians, diplomats and civil servants working in Brussels commenting on how they have felt their own English being pulled in the direction of these foreign-language patterns. A common feature, evidently, is to accommodate to an increasingly syllable-timed rhythm. Others include the use of simplified sentence constructions, the avoidance of idioms and colloquial vocabulary, a slower rate of speech, and the use of clearer patterns of articulation (avoiding some of the assimilations and elisions which would be natural in a first-language setting). It is important to stress that this is not the 'foreigner talk' reported in an earlier ELT era. These people are not 'talking down' to their colleagues, or consciously adopting simpler expressions, for the English of their interlocutors may be as fluent as their own. It is a natural process of accommodation, which in due course could lead to new standardised forms.

It is plain that the emergence of hybrid trends and varieties raises all kinds of theoretical and pedagogical questions, several of which began to be addressed during the 1990s (see the range of issues addressed in Schneider, 1997 and Foley, 1999). They blur the long-standing distinctions between 'first', 'second' and 'foreign' language. They make us reconsider the notion of 'standard', especially

when we find such hybrids being used confidently and fluently by groups of people who have education and influence in their own regional setting. They present the traditionally clear-cut notion of ‘translation’ with all kinds of fresh problems, for (to go back to the Malaysian example) at what point in a conversation should we say that a notion of translation is relevant, as we move from ‘understanding’ to ‘understanding most of the utterance precisely’ to ‘understanding little of the utterance precisely (“getting the drift” or “gist”)’ to ‘understanding none of the utterance, despite its containing several features of English’? And, to move into the sociolinguistic dimension, hybrids give us new challenges in relation to language attitudes: for example, at what point would our insistence on the need for translation cause an adverse reaction from the participants, who might maintain they are ‘speaking English’, even though we cannot understand them? There have been analogous situations earlier in the history of English. William Caxton was the first to comment on it, in his Prologue to Virgil’s *Booke of Eneydos* (see Section 5.2.4). We are being faced again with *egges* and *eyren*, but on a global scale.